

What is claimed is:

1. A method of downloading a coupon for a product onto a smart card held by a user having access to a user computer that is in communication with a global computer network and a smart card reader/writer, the method comprising the steps of:
 - (a) transmitting to the user computer, via the global computer network, data referring to the product;
 - (b) receiving from the user computer, via the global computer network, data indicating that the user desires to receive a coupon for the product;
 - (c) transmitting to the user computer, via the global computer network, coupon data representative of the coupon; and
 - (d) writing the coupon data onto the smart card with the smart card reader/writer.
2. A method of downloading a coupon for a product onto a smart card held by a user having access to a user computer that is in communication with a global computer network and a first smart card reader/writer, and redeeming the coupon at a store that has a cash register including a processor in communication with a second smart card reader/writer and in communication with a telecommunications link, the method comprising the steps of:
 - (a) transmitting to the user computer, via the global computer network, data referring to the product;

- (b) receiving from the user computer, via the global computer network, data indicating that the user desires to receive a coupon for the product;
 - (c) transmitting to the user computer, via the global computer network, coupon data representative of the coupon;
 - (d) writing the coupon data onto the smart card with the first smart card reader/writer;
 - (e) reading the coupon data with the second smart card reader/writer;
 - (f) determining if a list of products, being purchased by the user, includes data corresponding to the coupon data; and
 - (g) if the list of products includes data corresponding to the coupon data, then crediting the user with an amount indicated by the coupon data.
3. A method of downloading a coupon for a product onto a smart card held by a user having access to a user computer that is in communication with a global computer network and a first smart card reader/writer, and presenting the coupon at a store that has a cash register including a processor in communication with a second smart card reader/writer and in communication with a telecommunications link, the method comprising the steps of:
- (a) transmitting to the user computer, via the global computer network, data referring to the product;
 - (b) receiving from the user computer, via the global computer network, data indicating that the user desires to receive a coupon for the product;

- (c) transmitting to the user computer, via the global computer network, coupon data representative of the coupon;
 - (d) writing the coupon data onto the smart card with the first smart card reader/writer;
 - (e) reading the coupon data with the second smart card reader/writer;
 - (f) determining if a list of products, being purchased by the user, includes data corresponding to the coupon data; and
 - (g) if the list of products includes data corresponding to the coupon data, then reporting the coupon to a coupon clearinghouse via a telecommunications link.
4. A method of administering an electronic coupon corresponding to coupon data stored on a smart card held by a user having access to a user computer that is in communication with a global computer network and a user smart card reader/writer, the user seeking to redeem the coupon at a store that has a cash register including a processor in communication with a store smart card reader/writer and in communication with a telecommunications link, the method comprising the steps of:
- (a) transmitting to the user computer, via the global computer network, data corresponding to a coupon for a product;
 - (b) receiving from the user computer, via the global computer network, data indicating that the user desires to receive the coupon;

- (c) transmitting to the user computer, via the global computer network, data representative of the coupon that is capable of being written onto the smart card by the user smart card reader/writer;
 - (d) reading the coupon data with the store smart card reader/writer;
 - (e) determining if a list of products, being purchased by the user, includes data corresponding to the coupon data; and
 - (f) if the list of products includes data corresponding to the coupon data, then
 - (i) crediting the user with an amount indicated by the coupon data; and
 - (ii) reporting the coupon to a coupon clearinghouse via a telecommunications link.
5. A method of receiving and redeeming coupons, redeemable at a store, with a smart card with a computer in communication with a global computer network and a smart card reader/writer and having a monitor, comprising the steps of:
- (a) viewing a plurality of available downloadable coupons received via the global computer network on the computer monitor;
 - (b) generating an input to the computer indicating a selection of a selected coupon from the plurality of available downloadable coupons;
 - (c) placing the smart card in the smart card reader/writer so that the computer causes data corresponding to the selected coupon to be written to the smart card; and

- (d) presenting the smart card to a smart card reader/writer at the store while purchasing a product corresponding to the coupon,
 - (e) whereby the store applies a credit specified by the coupon data to a purchase price of the product.
- 6. An electronic coupon downloading apparatus, comprising:
 - (a) a processor in communication with a global computer network;
 - (b) a smart card reader/writer circuit, in communication with the processor, capable of writing data to a smart card; and
 - (c) a program that causes the processor to write coupon data that is received via the global computer network onto a smart card via the smart card reader/writer circuit.
- 7. A system comprising:
 - an electronic coupon downloading apparatus including:
 - (a) a processor in communication with a global computer network;
 - (b) a first smart card reader/writer, in communication with the processor, capable of writing data to a smart card; and
 - (c) a program that causes the processor to write coupon data that is received via the global computer network onto a smart card via the first smart card reader/writer; and
 - a checkout station, for reading the coupon data stored on the smart card held by a user, including:

- (a) a cash register;
- (b) a processor in communication with the cash register and with a telecommunications link;
- (c) a second smart card reader/writer in communication with the processor;
- and
- (d) a program that executes the steps of:
 - (i) reading coupon data on the smart card with the second smart card reader/writer;
 - (ii) determining if a list of products, being purchased by the user, includes data corresponding to the coupon data;
 - (iii) if the list of products includes data corresponding to the coupon data, then crediting the user with a refund of an amount indicated by the coupon data; and
 - (iv) reporting the coupon to a coupon clearinghouse via the telecommunications link.